

Message Text

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USIA-06 IO-10 NEA-10 ACDA-05 AF-06 DLOS-04 EB-07

OFA-01 SIL-01 LAB-04 CU-02 OMB-01 FEAE-00 SAM-01

CIEP-01 ERDA-05 FPC-01 OES-03 HUD-01 HEW-02 DHA-02

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6738

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 17898

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PEOV, PINT, UK

SUBJECT: QUEEN'S SPEECH OPENS PARLIAMENT; DEVOLUTION TO
BE DELAYED

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REF: (A) LONDON 17529 (B) LONDON 12220 (C) LONDON 17454

SUMMARY - QUEEN ELIZABETH II OPENED 1975-76 PARLIAMENT NOVEMBER 19 WITH SHORT, CONCISE SPEECH OUTLINING GOVERNMENT'S POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE OBJECTIVES FOR COMING YEAR. IT CONTAINED NO REAL SURPRISES, BUT WAS SHORT ON DETAIL. MINOR OMISSIONS AND APPARENT MODIFICATIONS IN EMPHASIS, HOWEVER, PROVIDED GRIST FOR SPECULATIVE MILLS. OPPOSITION REACTION WAS ENTIRELY PREDICTABLE, AS WAS THAT OF LABOR'S LEFT-WING. MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT WAS FOLLOW-ON STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER WILSON IN WHICH HE REVEALED GOVERNMENT HAD GIVEN UP ITS COMMITMENT TO COMPLETE ACTION ON DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION DURING CURRENT PARLIAMENT. THIS ANNOUNCEMENT WAS NOT ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED, BUT DEEPLY ANGERED NATIONALIST MPS. IT CLEARLY INCREASES RISK OF NATIONALIST AND SEPARATIST BACKLASH IN SCOTLAND AND WALES, BUT SHOULD DIMINISH POSSIBILITY OF HASTY, ILL-CONCEIVED LEGISLATION. MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT REFLECTS CURRENT PARLIAMENTARY SENTIMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. READING RELATIVELY BRIEF MESSAGE WHICH FEATURED SHORT, DECLARATIVE SENTENCES, ELIZABETH II OPENED 1975-76 PARLIAMENT NOVEMBER 19, DESCRIBING LABOR GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM OF ACTION FOR COMING YEAR. SPEECH CONTAINED VIRTUALLY NOTHING THAT WAS UNEXPECTED, GENERALLY HEWING CLOSELY TO PARTY MANIFESTO AND OTHER GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS (REFS A AND B), THOUGH SOME APPARENT SHIFTS IN EMPHASIS WERE NOTED. QUEEN'S SPEECH WAS ACCOMPANIED BY TRADITIONAL POMP AND CEREMONY, DESPITE DARK WEATHER AND DRIZZLING SKIES.

2. PRINCIPAL POINTS ARE SUMMARIZED BELOW (TEXT FOLLOWS BY POUCH):

A. INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS - STRESSING HER BELIEF THAT "LONG-STANDING FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION" WITH U.S. WILL CONTINUE TO GROW, ELIZABETH ANNOUNCED PLANS TO VISIT THE U.S. NEXT YEAR AND TO PARTICIPATE IN BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS. SHE ALSO ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO VISIT FINLAND AND CANADA (TO OPEN OLYMPIC GAMES). UK COMMITMENT TO UN
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CHARTER, COMMONWEALTH TIES, PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND CONCERN FOR EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF WORLD'S RESOURCES WERE REAFFIRMED, AS WAS COMMITMENT TO EC. SHE STRESSED UK'S SUPPORT OF INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO INCREASE WORLD ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND REDUCE INFLATION. ADDITIONALLY, GOVERNMENT WILL WORK FOR PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST, LASTING SETTLEMENT IN CYPRUS, RESOLUTION OF RHODESIAN PROBLEM AND NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR FISHING OFF ICELAND.

B. DOMESTIC ECONOMY - HMG ATTACHES "HIGHEST PRIORITY TO ATTACK ON INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT," AND WILL WORK CLOSELY WITH TUC, CBI AND BRITISH PEOPLE TO RESOLVE THESE PROBLEMS. PRICE CONTROLS WILL BE CONTINUED, BUT NEW STABILIZATION PROGRAM WAS PROMISED, ONCE "COST INCREASES DECLINE." NATIONAL ENTERPRISE BOARD (NEB) AND SCOTTISH AND WELSH DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES WILL BE IMPORTANT ECONOMIC POLICY INSTRUMENTS, AS WILL PLANNING AGREEMENTS WHICH WILL BE APPLIED TO KEY INDUSTRIES. AIRCRAFT AND SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRIES WILL BE NATIONALIZED. IN ADDITION, GOVERNMENT WILL INTRODUCE "LEGISLATION TO REMOVE REMAINING FEATURES OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT OF 1971" (FREEDOM OF PRESS ISSUE -- REF C AND PREVIOUS), ENCOURAGE INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS, MAXIMIZE FOOD PRODUCTION WHILE IMPROVING CAP, AND ENACT DEVELOPMENT LAND

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C. DEFENSE - HMG WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK AGREEMENT ON GENERAL DISARMAMENT, NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION, STRENGTHENING NATO, INCLUDING COMMON DEFENSE PROCUREMENT, AND MBFR NEGOTIATIONS. HMG WILL ALSO PURSUE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF CSCE.

D. DEVOLUTION - GOVERNMENT WILL "BRING FOWARD LEGISLATION PROPOSALS" FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF SCOTTISH AND WELSH ASSEMBLIES WHICH WILL "EXERCISE WIDE GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN UK FRAMEWORK."

E. NORTHERN IRELAND - GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE QUEST FOR "CONSTITUTIONAL SOLUTION TO PROBLEMS OF NI," WHILE WORKING TO ELIMINATE TERRORISM AND DEALING WITH THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR VIOLENCE IN COURT SYSTEM. IT WILL ALSO INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO GUARANTEE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FMR PEOPLE OF BOTH RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND TO ENLARGE ROLE OF NI FINANCE CORP.

F. ENERGY - HMG WILL SEEK ORDERLY DEVELOPMENT OF OIL AND GAS RESOUPCES "IN INTERESTS OF NATION," AND WILL INVITE APPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION/DEVELOPMENT LICENSES.

G. SOCIAL PROGRAMS - ADDITIONAL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HOUSING WILL E PUSHED, ALONG WITH LEGISLATION OUTLINING FUTURE HOUSING POLICY. SYSTEM OF "TIED COTTAGES" FOR FARMWORKERS WILL BE ABOLISHED. PENSIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS WILL BE INCREASED TO PROTECT LIVING STANDARDS OF RECIPIENTS. SELECTION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

WILL BE ENDED, AND LAWS AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION WILL BE STRENGTHENED.

H. PARLIAMENTARY REFORM - MAJOR REVIEW OF PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES WAS PROMISED, AS WAS DECISION ON RADIO BROADCAST OF PARLIAMENTARY SESSIONS.

I. GOVERNMENT PRACTICES - GOVERNMENT WILL OFFER AMENDMENTS TO OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT, LIBERALIZING RULES FOR RELEASE OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTS. ACTION ON COMPLAINTS AGAINST POLICE, CONSPIRACY LAW, ANTI-CONFIDENTIAL

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TERRORIST MEASURES AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE WAS ALSO PROMISED.

3. WHILE THERE WERE NO MAJOR OMISSIONS FROM LABOR PARTY'S MANIFESTO, ABSENCE OF ANY REFERENCE TO POSSIBLE REFORM OF LORDS ANGERED SOME LABOR BACKBENCHERS (REF C). LABOR LEFT-WINGERS ALSO SEIZED ON ABSENCE OF ANY MENTION OF NATIONALIZING DOCKS AS FURTHER SIGN OF GOVERNMENT BACKSLIDING ON ITS COMMITMENT TO "SOCIALISM," WHILE SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS (AND SOME PRO-DEVOLUTIONISTS) CLAIMED THAT BLAND, LOW-KEY STATEMENT ON DEVOLUTION REVEALED DIMINISHING GOVERNMENT WILL ON THIS FRONT. ASIDE FROM REVISED DEVOLUTION TIMETABLE (SEE BELOW), MOST NOTABLE APPARENT SHIFT IN EMPHASIS WAS FORMULATION OF STATEMENT ON NI POLICY. POWERSHARING, WHICH HAS BEEN KEYSTONE OF GOVERNMENT POLICY, WAS NOT MENTIONED. RATHER, REFERENCE WAS MADE TO "CONSTITUTIONAL SOLUTION." LACKING FURTHER BACKGROUND ON THIS EVIDENT CHANGE, WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE IT REPRESENTS TEMPORARY TACTICAL WITHDRAWAL DICTATED BY PENDING NI CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION REPORT WHICH IS EXPECTED TO COME BEFORE PARLIAMENT EARLY THIS SESSION. NEVERTHELESS, WE SHALL BE ALERT TO OTHER SIGNS OF POSSIBLE RETREAT ON THIS QUESTION.

4. PRIME MINISTER WILSON, SPEAKING LATER IN DEBATE OF SPEECH, CONFIRMED FEARS OF NATIONALISTS AND PRO-DEVOLUTIONISTS. HE REPORTED THAT GOVERNMENT HAD REVISED ITS DEVOLUTION TIMETABLE AND WILL NO LONGER PUSH TO COMPLETE LEGISLATIVE ACTION IN CURRENT PARLIAMENT SESSION. AT SAME TIME HE DENIED ANY WEAKENING OF GOVERNMENT'S WILL TO DEVOLVE POWER TO REGIONS, NOTING THAT ADDITIONAL TIME WAS REQUIRED FOR WIDE DEBATE AND EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. SPEAKING LATER ON SAME TOPIC, LEADER OF HOUSE EDWARD SHORT REAFFIRMED GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT, INDICATING THAT DELAY WAS NECESSARY TO ENSURE BRITISH PEOPLE ARE FULLY INFORMED OF DEVOLUTION PLANS AND IMPLICATIONS. TORY LEADERSHIP WELCOMED WILSON'S STATEMENT (MRS. THATCHER HAD EARLIER CALLED

FOR MORE TIME TO CONSIDER THIS MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION), AS DID MANY ENGLISH BACKBENCHERS ON BOTH SIDES OF AISLE. NATIONALIST REACTION WAS SHARP, POINTED AND NEGATIVE.

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TIVE. SNP LEADER DONALD STEWART ASSERTED THAT SNP WILL
JOIN CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION AT FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO DE-
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FEAT GOVERNMENT AND FORCE EARLY ELECTION. THESE SENTI-
MENTS WERE ECHOED BY PLAID CYMRU (WELSH NATIONALIST
PARTY) SPOKESMAN. WILSON'S ANNOUNCEMENT DID NOT SUR-
PRISE LABOR'S BACKBENCH PRO-DEVOLUTIONISTS, BUT IT LEFT
THEM DEPRESSED AND DISPIRITED. THEY HAD BEEN WELL AWARE
OF GROWING "ELGLISH BACKLASH" IN COMMONS AND HAD SUSPEC-
TED GOVERNMENT WOULD ACCOMMODATE TO THIS SENTIMENT. NE-
VERTHELESS, THEY BELIEVE, AS DO WE, THAT GOVERNMENT'S
DECISION WILL GIVE FRESH IMPETUS TO NATIONALIST SENTI-
MENT.

5. IN ADDITION TO HER COMMENTS ON DEVOLUTION, TORY LEA-
DER THATCHER ENDORSED GOVERNMENT'S EMPHASIS ON CONTROL-
LING INFLATION (SHE DID NOT MENTION UNEMPLOYMENT), BUT
ATTACKED MEANQ CHOSEN BY GOVERNMENT TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL,
ESPECIALLY CONTINUED HIGH LEVELS OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURE
AND BORROWING, SHE ALSO CRITICISED GOVERNMENT'S EDUCA-
TION AND SOCIAL PROGRAM PROPOSALS AND EXPRESSED FEAR THAT
FAILURE TO MOTE QUICKLY ON NI CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
REPORT WOULD LEAVE "DANGEROUS VACUUM" IN THAT PROVINCE.
HARSHEST ATTACK ON GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM, HOWEVER, CAME
FROM THE REAR WHERE EXTREME LEFT-WINGERS FULMINATED AND
POSTURED OVER GOVERNMENT'S ALLEGED "RETREAT FROM SOCIA-
LISM." LEFTISTS, HOWEVER, WERE UNABLE TO POINT TO MANY
SPECIFIC "SELLOUTS" OTHER THAN ABSENT COMMITMENT TO NA-
TIONALIZE DOCKS.

6. DEBATE ON QUEEN'S SPEECH WILL CONTINUE, NO DOUBT CO-
VERING THE MANY POINTS WHICH HAVE NOT YET BEEN ADDRESSED.
DEVOLUTION, HMWEVER, PROMISES TO BE MOST CONTENTIOUS SUB-
JECT IN THESE DEBATES, AND IT MAY WELL BE THE MOST SIGNI-
FICANT IN TERMS OF BRITAIN'S FUTURE. THE NATIONALISTS'
THREAT TO JOIN TORIES TO DEFEAT GOVERNMENT WOULD APPEAR
TO FURTHER CONSTRAIN GOVERNMENT'S FREEDOM OF PARLIAMEN-
TARY ACTION. PIVOTAL UNKNOWN IN THIS EQUATION, HOWEVER,
IS TORY ATTITUDE TOWARD FORCING EARLY ELECTION: AT THIS
POINT THERE APE FEW SIGNS THAT CONSERVATIVES ARE ANXIOUS

TO GO TO THE POLLS IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

RICHARDSON

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